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APOSTOLICAL SUCCESSION.



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APOSTOLICAL SUCCESSION.

I. EVERY person who sets up a claim to be a minister and pastor of the Christian religion must do so in one or other of these four ways :

a. He may claim to have been sent directly by God Himself.

b. He may claim to derive his commission in regular fashion from those whom God did send directly, empowering them to send others in their turn.

c. He may claim to be the elected choice of the congregation to which he ministers, or of the society of which he is a member.

d. He may simply act on his own judgment of his fitness to be a teacher.

II. Only in the first and second cases can he be really *God's* messenger, with a *right* to speak in His Name. In the third case, he is only *man's* messenger. In the fourth case, he is nobody's messenger but *his own*.

III. A man who claims to have been sent directly by God must have some token or proof to show the people that his claim is a sound one. He may feel quite certain of the fact himself, but that is no evidence to anyone else. The only evidence which could be received at all would be the power of working miracles. Even that would not be

enough, if his teaching contradicted the old Gospel (Gal. i. 8), but nothing less could be accepted for a moment, because no religious delusion is commoner in people who are over-enthusiastic or out of their mind than to fancy they have a Divine call.

Somewhat amplified add example given from S. John XX 21-23
 IV. The second way is the Bible way, both under the Law and under the Gospel. God sent the first regular and lawful ministers, and left it to them to keep up the supply afterwards. Under the Law, He made Aaron High Priest, and his sons lower priests beneath him (Exod. xxviii. 1); ordained that the Priesthood should remain in their family alone (Numb. xviii. 1); and passed sentence of death on all others who should attempt to take the office on themselves (Numb. xviii. 7); a sentence which was actually carried out by a miracle in the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numb. xvi. 31, 35).

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 V. Thus all men of Aaron's family were eligible to become Priests; but though they were born with a right to the Priesthood, they could not exercise it till they had been regularly consecrated by those who were Priests before them (Exod. xxix 29: Numb. iii. 3). Many hundred years after Aaron's time, Uzziah, King of Judah, was struck with leprosy for attempting to offer incense in the Temple at Jerusalem (2 Chron. xxvi. 16—21), not being a Priest.

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 VI. There were other ministers of religion besides the Priests under the Jewish Law. First were the Levites, of the same *tribe* as the Priests, but not of the same *family* in the tribe. They were regularly commissioned by God to assist the Priests in the minor parts of their duties (Numb.

iii. 5 ; xviii. 2). Besides these were certain extraordinary ministers, named Prophets or Seers, whom God raised up at times, and sent directly, such as Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, and Daniel. These all had to show, and did show, some proof of their special commission (1 Sam. iii. 30 ; xii. 16 ; 1 Kings xviii. 36 ; 2 Kings ii. 20 ; iv. 33, 42 ; vii. 1 ; Isa. vii. 3 ; Dan. ii. 19), for it was as strictly forbidden by the Law, under the same penalty of death, for any man to take on himself the office of a Prophet as the office of a Priest (Deut. xiii. 1 ; xviii. 20).

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VII. Under the Gospel the same *principle* holds good, though the way of working it is different. Our Lord came to set up a kingdom on earth, and He chose the Twelve Apostles to be its chief officers (St. Matt. x. 1). He also chose seventy of the disciples as inferior officers (St. Luke x. 1). When a vacancy happened amongst the Apostles by the death of Judas Iscariot, the eleven others elected St. Matthias by lot into their company, and set him apart for his office (Acts i. 23, 26). But more Apostles were added later. St. Paul, though especially converted and commissioned by Christ Himself, and given the power of working miracles, nevertheless was regularly ordained by the other Apostles at Jerusalem, as also was St. Barnabas, who is given the same title of Apostle (Acts xiii. 2 ; xiv. 14); and later on we find Andronicus and Junia called Apostles too (Rom. xvi. 7).

VIII. Thus it appears that the only difference between the Jewish and the Christian Church about ministers of religion is that under the Law the office of the Priesthood was confined to one

family, but under the Gospel anyone, Jew or Gentile, might be chosen and ordained by the Apostles to the *Apostleship* (Acts xiii. 2), to the rank of *Elder* or *Priest* (Acts xiv. 23), or to be *Deacons* (Acts vi. 5, 6); just as Elijah was empowered to set Elisha apart as a Prophet (1 Kings xix. 16, 19). And in this way St. Paul not only sent Timothy and Titus, but gave them power to ordain and send others (1 Tim. iv. 14, 2 Tim. i. 13, ii. 2, Tit. i. 5). Neither under the Law nor the Gospel could a man take the office on himself (Heb. v. 4), nor accept it at the hands of persons who had no right to give it (Judg. xvii. 5, 6, 10, 12; 1 Kings xiii. 33, 34; 2 Cor. xi. 13; Rev. ii. 2).

IX. For fifteen hundred years after Christ, the body of the faithful everywhere throughout the world retained the three same ranks in the Christian ministry as those named above. Only, in honour of the first Apostles, they soon dropped that title as too sacred for their successors, and gave the highest order of ministers the title of *Bishop*, a name which is sometimes applied in the New Testament to the second order of ministers, the Elders or Priests (Phil. i. 1; 1 Tim. iii. 1). To these Bishops alone the right of ordaining others to their own office or to any lower one in the Church was strictly confined, and just as the regular Jewish Priests born as sons of other priests in lawful wedlock formed the *Aaronic* or *Levitical Succession*, so the whole body of Christian Bishops and Priests, who have been duly set apart for their office generation after generation, form the *Apostolical Succession*.

X. We find this three-fold ministry of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons in full working just after the

death of the Apostles, and mentioned by St. Clement, St. Paul's friend and companion (Phil. iv. 3), St. Ignatius, friend and pupil of St. John, and St. Irenæus, who was taught by St. Polycarp, another of St. John's pupils, and who died a martyr in A.D. 178, just seventeen hundred years ago. The last of these, though later than the others, had just as good an opportunity of knowing what St. John taught and practised as an aged Wesleyan minister now has of knowing what John Wesley believed. As to St. Clement, he tells us plainly that the Apostles, foreseeing that there would be disputes about the rulership of the Church, laid down that they themselves first, and certain chosen men after them, should appoint to the ministerial office when those originally set apart had died, and so keep up a succession. Nor can the slightest trace be found, save in a few secret and obscure sects, of any other mode of appointing Christian ministers for fifteen hundred years, though the laity long retained the right which they were given when the first Deacons were made, of choosing the persons whom the Apostles or Bishops were to ordain (Acts vi. 3, 5, 6); just as every year amongst ourselves, the Queen appoints a High Sheriff for each county, out of two or three suitable names picked beforehand by others, and submitted to her for approval.

XI. This is the only way in which any man, not directly and miraculously sent, can now claim to have any commission from God to be a pastor and minister in His Church. There is not any sect of Protestant Dissenters in Great Britain or America which has any claim to possess such a commission. In a very large number of sects

there is no pretence to it. ~~The Quakers and Plymouth Brethren, for instance, have no stated ministry at all, and even regard one as sinful, in plain opposition to Holy Scripture. Amongst several bodies, such as the Independents, choice or election by the flock makes the pastor, and any additional ceremony performed by other ministers of the body is merely for the sake of decency and orderliness, and as a mark of friendly recognition. But such pastors are sent only by their own lay folk, and not by God. They differ from a real Priest of God's Church, much as any man in a crowd, whom two or three others choose as their private umpire or referee for the settlement of a dispute, differs from a Judge of one of the regular Courts of Law, appointed by the Crown.~~

XII. The Baptists are in the same position as the Independents, of whom they are an offshoot. The Methodists do not even pretend to have any other claim than as followers of John Wesley; they never used ordination by laying on of hands till 1834, forty-three years after his death; and they now disobey the plain command of their founder by professing to administer the Holy Communion, which he most strictly forbad. So they have forfeited even such a commission as he could give them.

XIII. Some of the ~~Presbyterians~~ *Protestants* *(and so througho.)* ~~take up a different ground. They agree with Churchmen that a real minister of God's Church must have a regular commission, and be sent by the laying on of hands of those who have received their commission in regular succession from the Apostles. But they say that the second order of ministers, the Elders or Priests, possess the right of ordain-~~

ing as much as Bishops, and that in this fashion they themselves retain the Apostolical Succession, through certain Priests or Presbyters who founded their communion at the Reformation.

There are three answers to this. First, there is not *one* instance to be found in the Church for fifteen hundred years of any one lower than a Bishop conferring the priesthood or diaconate, though several Priests often joined in the act of ordination as a token of public consent and approval, ~~as in fact is done still in the English~~

~~Ordinal. Next, even if it could be shown that in the Primitive Church the Elders did ordain, yet they had certainly lost that power everywhere sixteen hundred years ago. The whole Church took it from them somehow, and they cannot take it back for themselves without leave from the whole Church.~~

~~Just so, no one but the Queen or one of her Viceroys can now make a man a Knight of Great Britain. Formerly any one who was himself a Knight could give that rank to any one else. Now, this practice has quite died out, and no one would allow that a man knighted by a mere Knight, without the Queen's permission, had really been knighted at all. And in like manner Presbyters now cannot ordain other Presbyters, even if they ever could have done so, of which there is no evidence whatever.~~

~~Thirdly, the chief Presbyterian body in these islands, that of Scotland, which is the parent of the English, Irish, and American societies, was begun in 1560 on the Independent model, by John Knox, without any ordination of ministers by laying on of hands at all. This was added as an afterthought many years later, but without ordaining in this way~~

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the ministers first chosen, very few of whom had been formerly Priests in the old Church, or anything but mere laymen. So, even when ordination did come in, many, if not all, of those who had once been priests were dead, and the new batch of ministers had laid on them the hands of those who had never been thus set apart themselves; and thus, even if the Presbyterian opinion that priests can ordain were true, it is of no use for defending Presbyterian Orders in this country, since they do not come from presbyters, but from laymen.

not quite literally understood

XIV. On the other hand, the Church of England has been extremely careful to preserve the succession of her ministers free from every break or irregularity. She can trace back the line of her Bishops unbroken for twelve hundred years, and can show that the source whence they came then is continuous also. And she lays down in the Prayer-book, first, that there always have been Bishops, Priests, and Deacons from the time of the Apostles till now; and next, that no man shall be allowed to act in any of these offices in her service who has not been regularly ordained by a Bishop. So a Roman Catholic or a Greek Priest who came over to the Church of England would be allowed to officiate at once; but a Dissenting minister of any kind would have to be ordained before he could hold the smallest curacy. The Bishops and clergy of the Church of England now are the old line in regular order, and all other religious teachers in England are virtually trespassers.

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XV. Several objections are raised against the doctrine of Apostolical Succession. Despite the plain Bible facts already mentioned, people say:

Obj. 1. All Christians are "a holy priesthood, a peculiar people" (1 S. Peter ii. 5, 9), and there is thus no distinction of order between them, and no separate class of priests. *Ans.* This is exactly what Korah said to Moses and Aaron: "All the congregation are holy" (Numb. xvi. 3), ~~for which he had the warrant of God's own words~~ "Ye shall be unto Me a Kingdom of Priests, and a holy nation" (Exod. xix. 6), and therefore he claimed to be as real a Priest as Aaron, for which God slew him. And the Apostle St. Jude tells us that "the gainsaying of Core"—*i.e.*, Korah—is a sin which can be committed by professing Christians (St. Jude 11). Besides, no Dissenters who have any stated ministry (and there are very few who have not) have a right to use this argument at all, even if it were true, since they themselves make a marked distinction between pastors and flocks. It may be added too, that all Christians are called "Kings" as well as "priests" (Rev. i. 6; v. 10), but that does not put every man or woman in England on a level with the Sovereign.

Obj. 2. When the Apostles saw a stranger casting out devils in Christ's Name, and forbad him, they were told not to forbid him, because "he that is not against us is for us" (St. Luke ix. 50). *Ans.* But this will not apply now, for these three reasons. First, the man did work a *miracle* in Christ's Name, and proved thereby his right. The sons of Sceva tried to do the same thing afterwards, and failed miserably (Acts xix. 13, 16). Next, at the time when the Apostles complained, our Lord had not yet regularly set up nor organized the Church. That was not done till the Day of Pentecost after His Ascension, since which time the Church acts

a few verbal alterations throughout these objections—

with His direct authority, and is the only body which does so. Lastly: Dissenters *are* against the Church. They set up rival assemblies, and try to draw away people from the Church. The only ones that ever so much as professed to help the Church were the Methodists, and now they do like all the rest, and would never refrain from building a meeting-house in any parish, because the parish church was big enough for all, or because the parson was a good and pious man who preached the Gospel. So they come under that other text: "He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad" (St. Matt. xii. 30). There is only one example in the New Testament of a man setting up on his own account as a religious teacher from good motives. That was Apollos, an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures. But the moment he was taught better, he joined the Church and worked with St. Paul (Acts xviii. 24, 26; 1 Cor. iii. 6; xvi. 12).

Obj. 3. The Apostolical Succession, even granting that it once existed, must have been broken and destroyed long ago, amidst all the violence and irregularity of ancient and mediæval times; for if one link in the chain ever failed, the whole chain must have dropped asunder at once, and there can be no doubt that links did fail several times in one way or other. *Ans.* Nobody could raise such a plea who had taken the trouble to find out the real facts. This danger has been guarded against from the very earliest times by making it the general rule that *three* Bishops shall always join in consecrating any fresh person to be a Bishop. One consecrator is *enough*, but *three* or more have been the custom all along. So, then, if

A, *B*, and *C*, three Bishops, meet to ordain *D* as a Bishop also, and even *A* and *B*, two out of these three, are not real Bishops at all, yet if *C* be a real Bishop, *D* will become one also; and all the harm *A* or *B* may have done dies out with the men they ordained by themselves to be Priests. And as time goes on, so many more lines of succession meet in every fresh Bishop, that it becomes impossible to break the descent. Apostolical Succession is, therefore, not like a chain of single links, but like a very closely twisted network of rings, every one of which fastens on to three or more others, so that many single rings might be broken away in different places without ~~really weakening the strength of the net, much less destroying it~~ altogether. *The Chain* -

Obj. 4. It is very *uncharitable* to deny the Orders of good and pious men, such as many ~~Dissenting~~ *Protestants* ~~ministers~~. *Ans.* This is just what unbelievers say when Christians tell them that if they want to be saved they must believe in Christ. They answer that it is very "uncharitable" to limit God's goodness in such a way. The real *charity* is to tell the truth; and if well-meaning men be deceiving themselves and others by taking on them an office which is not theirs, it is the truest kindness to warn them of their mistake. But, as a fact, Churchmen do not deny that Dissenting ministers are all that they now actually claim to be, and can do all they profess to do. Dissenters do not attempt to show any Divine commission, they do not undertake to offer the Sacrifice of the Lord's Body and Blood, nor to bind and loose the sins of men. These are the special privileges of the Christian Priesthood, and as Dissenters do not claim to have them, nor

even to believe in them, there is no want of charity in saying that they certainly have not got them; though they may perhaps often do a great deal of good in their own irregular fashion, by preaching even part of the Gospel.

Obj. 5. Even if Apostolical Succession be true as a theory, it cannot matter in practice whether any Christian Society has got it or not, so long as the Gospel is truly preached by pious men. Piety is the true Apostolical Succession, and no other is wanted. *Ans.* It is part of the true Gospel to obey Christ and His officers, instead of doing like those who "heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (2 Tim. iv. 3); for people who choose ministers of their own, cut themselves off thereby from God's Church; ~~just as if a number of English citizens were to declare that they would not obey the Queen, the Parliament, or the magistrates, but would make their own civil laws, and choose their own civil officers. If they did, they would at once be outlaws in conduct, no matter how quietly they behaved; and if over and above all this, they resisted and opposed the lawful authorities, they would be rebels.~~ Piety, besides, has nothing to do with the valid *rights* of the matter. Eli's sons were bad men, but they were real Priests (1 Sam. ii. 12); Judas Iscariot was a bad man, but he was a real Apostle (St. John vi. 70); and it would have been no defence for anyone taking upon himself to act as a Priest or an Apostle, to say that he was a better man than Hophni and Phinehas or than Judas Iscariot. Two wrongs will never make a right; and though it is quite true that a Christian minister who is not personally pious will do little good; it is also true that piety alone no more

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makes any man a lawful pastor, than fairmindedness and knowledge of law make a man a judge of the land, in default of a regular commission from the Crown. And true piety will not usurp functions which have not been duly given.

XVI. In sum :

a. Apostolical Succession is the doctrine of the Bible.

b. Apostolical Succession is the unbroken custom of the whole Church.

~~*c.* Apostolical Succession is the law and practice of the Church of England.~~

d. Apostolical Succession is not an uncharitable doctrine.

e. Apostolical Succession is needful for all pastors who do not wish to violate the laws and defy the officers of the Kingdom of Christ.

~~N.B. — Look out all the texts carefully.~~

~~Those who desire fuller information may consult the following books :—~~

~~Bishop Cotterill's Genesis of the Church.~~

~~Haddan's Apostolical Succession in the Church of England.~~

~~Hickes on the Priesthood.~~

~~Mitchell, Plain Statement on Church Government.~~

~~Percival's Apology for the Apostolical Succession.~~

~~Archbishop Potter on Church Government.~~

~~Stubbs, Registrum Sacrum Anglicanum.~~

~~Thorndike on the Government of Churches.~~

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